

# Chapter 31

## The Gulf War

(1990)

George Bush

### 1 Introduction

2 On August 2, 1990, the Iraqi army invaded Kuwait. Iraq's dictator, Saddam Hussein,  
3 immediately announced the annexation of Kuwait. Over the next month the United States and its  
4 former Cold War opponent, the USSR, attempted to persuade Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait.  
5 The United States sent troops to Saudi Arabia within a week to protect that country from a  
6 possible Iraqi assault. On September 11, 1990, President George Bush appeared before a joint  
7 session of Congress to explain his policies on the Persian Gulf while calling for a balanced  
8 budget. On January 16, 1991, the United States and its allies launched a massive air attack on  
9 Iraq; on February 23 allied troops invaded Iraq. The ground war lasted only four days, leaving  
10 Hussein in power but no longer in possession of Kuwait.

### 12 Questions to Consider

- 13 • Why was it necessary for the United States to respond militarily to Iraq's invasion of  
14 Kuwait?
- 15 • What relationship existed between the conflict in the Persian Gulf and a balanced budget?
- 16 • Was it possible to balance the budget while increasing military expenditures?

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17 We gather tonight, witness to events in the Persian Gulf as significant as they are tragic. In the  
18 early morning hours of August 2d, following negotiations and promises by Iraq's dictator  
19 Saddam Hussein not to use force, a powerful Iraqi army invaded its trusting and much weaker  
20 neighbor, Kuwait. Within 3 days, 120,000 Iraqi troops with 850 tanks had poured into Kuwait  
21 and moved south to threaten Saudi Arabia. It was then that I decided to act to check that  
22 aggression.  
23

24 At this moment, our brave servicemen and women stand watch in that distant desert and on  
25 distant seas, side by side with the forces of more than 20 other nations. They are some of the  
26 finest men and women of the United States of America. And they're doing one terrific job....  
27

28 A soldier, Private First Class Wade Merritt of Knoxville, Tennessee, now stationed in Saudi  
29 Arabia, wrote his parents of his worries, his love of family, and his hope for peace. But Wade  
30 also wrote, "I am proud of my country and its firm stance against inhumane aggression. I am  
31 proud of my army and its men. I am proud to serve my country." Well, let me just say, Wade,  
32 America is proud of you and is grateful to every soldier, sailor, marine, and airman serving the  
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1 cause of peace in the Persian Gulf. I also want to thank the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,  
2 General Powell; the Chiefs here tonight; our commander in the Persian Gulf, General  
3 Schwarzkopf; and the men and women of the Department of Defense. What a magnificent job  
4 you all are doing. And thank you very, very much from a grateful people. I wish I could say that  
5 their work is done. But we all know it's not.

6  
7 So, if there ever was a time to put country before self and patriotism before party, the time is  
8 now.... So, tonight I want to talk to you about what's at stake - what we must do together to  
9 defend civilized values around the world and maintain our economic strength at home.

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11 Our objectives in the Persian Gulf are clear, our goals defined and familiar: Iraq must withdraw  
12 from Kuwait completely, immediately, and without condition. Kuwait's legitimate government  
13 must be restored. The security and stability of the Persian Gulf must be assured. And American  
14 citizens abroad must be protected. These goals are not ours alone. They've been endorsed by the  
15 United Nations Security Council five times in as many weeks. Most countries share our concern  
16 for principle. And many have a stake in the stability of the Persian Gulf. This is not, as Saddam  
17 Hussein would have it, the United States against Iraq. It is Iraq against the world.

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19 As you know, I've just returned from a very productive meeting with Soviet President  
20 Gorbachev. And I am pleased that we are working together to build a new relationship. In  
21 Helsinki, our joint statement affirmed to the world our shared resolve to counter Iraq's threat to  
22 peace. Let me quote: "We are united in the belief that Iraq's aggression must not be tolerated. No  
23 peaceful international order is possible if larger states can devour their smaller neighbors."  
24 Clearly, no longer can a dictator count on East-West confrontation to stymie concerted United  
25 Nations action against aggression. A new partnership of nations has begun.

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27 We stand today at a unique and extraordinary moment. The crisis in the Persian Gulf, as grave as  
28 it is, also offers a rare opportunity to move toward an historic period of cooperation. Out of these  
29 troubled times, our fifth objective - a new world order - can emerge: a new era - freer from the  
30 threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace. An era  
31 in which the nations of the world, East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in  
32 harmony. A hundred generations have searched for this elusive path to peace, while a thousand  
33 wars raged across the span of human endeavor. Today that new world is struggling to be born, a  
34 world quite different from the one we've known. A world where the rule of law supplants the  
35 rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and  
36 justice. A world where the strong respect the rights of the weak. This is the vision that I shared  
37 with President Gorbachev in Helsinki. He and other leaders from Europe, the Gulf, and around  
38 the world understand that how we manage this crisis today could shape the future for generations  
39 to come.

40  
41 The test we face is great, and so are the stakes. This is the first assault on the new world that we  
42 seek, the first test of our mettle. Had we not responded to this first provocation with clarity of  
43 purpose, if we do not continue to demonstrate our determination, it would be a signal to actual  
44 and potential despots around the world. America and the world must defend common vital  
45 interests - and we will. America and the world must support the rule of law - and we will.  
46 America and the world must stand up to aggression - and we will. And one thing more: In the

1 pursuit of these goals America will not be intimidated.

2  
3 Vital issues of principle are at stake. Saddam Hussein is literally trying to wipe a country off the  
4 face of the Earth. We do not exaggerate. Nor do we exaggerate when we say Saddam Hussein  
5 will fail. Vital economic interests are at risk as well. Iraq itself controls some 10 percent of the  
6 world's proven oil reserves. Iraq plus Kuwait controls twice that. An Iraq permitted to swallow  
7 Kuwait would have the economic and military power, as well as the arrogance, to intimidate and  
8 coerce its neighbors - neighbors who control the lion's share of the world's remaining oil  
9 reserves. We cannot permit a resource so vital to be dominated by one so ruthless. And we won't.

10  
11 Recent events have surely proven that there is no substitute for American leadership. In the face  
12 of tyranny, let no one doubt American credibility and reliability. Let no one doubt our staying  
13 power. We will stand by our friends. One way or another, the leader of Iraq must learn this  
14 fundamental truth. From the outset, acting hand in hand with others, we've sought to fashion the  
15 broadest possible international response to Iraq's aggression. The level of world cooperation and  
16 condemnation of Iraq is unprecedented. Armed forces from countries spanning four continents  
17 are there at the request of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia to deter and, if need be, to defend against  
18 attack. Moslems and non-Moslems, Arabs and non-Arabs, soldiers from many nations stand  
19 shoulder to shoulder, resolute against Saddam Hussein's ambitions.

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21 We can now point to five United Nations Security Council resolutions that condemn Iraq's  
22 aggression. They call for Iraq's immediate and unconditional withdrawal, the restoration of  
23 Kuwait's legitimate government, and categorically reject Iraq's cynical and self-serving attempt  
24 to annex Kuwait. Finally, the United Nations has demanded the release of all foreign nationals  
25 held hostage against their will and in contravention of international law. It is a mockery of  
26 human decency to call these people "guests." They are hostages, and the whole world knows it....

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28 We're now in sight of a United Nations that performs as envisioned by its founders. We owe  
29 much to the outstanding leadership of Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar. The United  
30 Nations is backing up its words with action. The Security Council has imposed mandatory  
31 economic sanctions on Iraq, designed to force Iraq to relinquish the spoils of its illegal conquest.  
32 The Security Council has also taken the decisive step of authorizing the use of all means  
33 necessary to ensure compliance with these sanctions. Together with our friends and allies, ships  
34 of the United States Navy are today patrolling Mideast waters. They've already intercepted more  
35 than 700 ships to enforce the sanctions. Three regional leaders I spoke with just yesterday told  
36 me that these sanctions are working. Iraq is feeling the heat. We continue to hope that Iraq's  
37 leaders will recalculate just what their aggression has cost them. They are cut off from world  
38 trade, unable to sell their oil. And only a tiny fraction of goods gets through.

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40 The communiqué with President Gorbachev made mention of what happens when the embargo is  
41 so effective that children of Iraq literally need milk or the sick truly need medicine. Then, under  
42 strict international supervision that guarantees the proper destination, then food will be  
43 permitted.

44  
45 At home, the material cost of our leadership can be steep. That's why Secretary of State Baker  
46 and Treasury Secretary Brady have met with many world leaders to underscore that the burden

1 of this collective effort must be shared. We are prepared to do our share and more to help carry  
2 that load; we insist that others do their share as well.

3  
4 The response of most of our friends and allies has been good. To help defray costs, the leaders of  
5 Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE - the United Arab Emirates - have pledged to provide our  
6 deployed troops with all the food and fuel they need. Generous assistance will also be provided  
7 to stalwart front-line nations, such as Turkey and Egypt....

8  
9 There's an energy-related cost to be borne as well. Oil-producing nations are already replacing  
10 lost Iraqi and Kuwaiti output. More than half of what was lost has been made up. And we're  
11 getting superb cooperation. If producers, including the United States, continue steps to expand  
12 oil and gas production, we can stabilize prices and guarantee against hardship. Additionally, we  
13 and several of our allies always have the option to extract oil from our strategic petroleum  
14 reserves if conditions warrant. As I've pointed out before, conservation efforts are essential to  
15 keep our energy needs as low as possible. And we must then take advantage of our energy  
16 sources across the board: coal, natural gas, hydro, and nuclear. Our failure to do these things has  
17 made us more dependent on foreign oil than ever before. Finally, let no one even contemplate  
18 profiteering from this crisis. We will not have it.

19  
20 I cannot predict just how long it will take to convince Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. Sanctions  
21 will take time to have their full intended effect. We will continue to review all options with our  
22 allies, but let it be clear: we will not let this aggression stand.

23  
24 Our interest, our involvement in the Gulf is not transitory. It predated Saddam Hussein's  
25 aggression and will survive it. Long after all our troops come home - and we all hope it's soon,  
26 very soon - there will be a lasting role for the United States in assisting the nations of the Persian  
27 Gulf. Our role then: to deter future aggression. Our role is to help our friends in their own self-  
28 defense. And something else: to curb the proliferation of chemical, biological, ballistic missile  
29 and, above all, nuclear technologies.

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31 Let me also make clear that the United States has no quarrel with the Iraqi people. Our quarrel is  
32 with Iraq's dictator and with his aggression. Iraq will not be permitted to annex Kuwait. That's  
33 not a threat, that's not a boast, that's just the way it's going to be.

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35 Our ability to function effectively as a great power abroad depends on how we conduct ourselves  
36 at home. Our economy, our Armed Forces, our energy dependence, and our cohesion all  
37 determine whether we can help our friends and stand up to our foes. For America to lead,  
38 America must remain strong and vital. Our world leadership and domestic strength are mutual  
39 and reinforcing; a woven piece, strongly bound as Old Glory. To revitalize our leadership, our  
40 leadership capacity, we must address our budget deficit - not after election day, or next year, but  
41 now.

42  
43 Higher oil prices slow our growth, and higher defense costs would only make our fiscal deficit  
44 problem worse. That deficit was already greater than it should have been - a projected \$232  
45 billion for the coming year. It must - it will - be reduced.

1 To my friends in Congress, together we must act this very month - before the next fiscal year  
2 begins on October 1st - to get America's economic house in order. The Gulf situation helps us  
3 realize we are more economically vulnerable than we ever should be. Americans must never  
4 again enter any crisis, economic or military, with an excessive dependence on foreign oil and an  
5 excessive burden of Federal debt....

6  
7 ...Congress should, this month, enact a prudent multiyear defense program, one that reflects not  
8 only the improvement in East-West relations but our broader responsibilities to deal with the  
9 continuing risks of outlaw action and regional conflict. Even with our obligations in the Gulf, a  
10 sound defense budget can have some reduction in real terms; and we're prepared to accept that.  
11 But to go beyond such levels, where cutting defense would threaten our vital margin of safety, is  
12 something I will never accept. The world is still dangerous. And surely, that is now clear.  
13 Stability's not secure. American interests are far reaching. Interdependence has increased. The  
14 consequences of regional instability can be global. This is no time to risk America's capacity to  
15 protect her vital interests....

16  
17 ...Congress should, this month, enact a 5-year program to reduce the projected debt and deficits  
18 by \$500 billion - that's by half a trillion dollars. And if, with the Congress, we can develop a  
19 satisfactory program by the end of the month, we can avoid the ax of sequester - deep across-the-  
20 board cuts that would threaten our military capacity and risk substantial domestic disruption. I  
21 want to be able to tell the American people that we have truly solved the deficit problem. And  
22 for me to do that, a budget agreement must meet these tests: It must include the measures I've  
23 recommended to increase economic growth and reduce dependence on foreign oil. It must be  
24 fair. All should contribute, but the burden should not be excessive for any one group of programs  
25 or people. It must address the growth of government's hidden liabilities. It must reform the  
26 budget process and, further, it must be real....

27  
28 Once again, Americans have stepped forward to share a tearful goodbye with their families  
29 before leaving for a strange and distant shore. At this very moment, they serve together with  
30 Arabs, Europeans, Asians, and Africans in defense of principle and the dream of a new world  
31 order. That's why they sweat and toil in the sand and the heat and the sun. If they can come  
32 together under such adversity, if old adversaries like the Soviet Union and the United States can  
33 work in common cause, then surely we who are so fortunate to be in this great Chamber -  
34 Democrats, Republicans, liberals, conservatives - can come together to fulfill our responsibilities  
35 here....